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SUBJECT: KUWAIT ESTH UPDATE

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11. (U) THIS IS AN ACTION REQUEST. PLEASE SEE PARAGRAPH 16.

12. (SBU) Summary: Kuwait's science and technology establishment is dominated by the government-funded Kuwait Institute for Scientific Research (KISR) and the non-governmental Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Science (KFAS). While both institutions are relatively well endowed with resources, Kuwait is lacking a national science policy and its competitiveness is constrained by a weak IPR regime and private sector engagement strategy. KFAS is keen to hold a 2009 follow up conference to the Department of State-supported January 2007 Women in Science Conference in Kuwait. The environmental landscape is bleak: 17 years after the oil-fires from the Iraqi invasion, the oil-lakes have yet to be remediated; the Kuwaiti Environmental Protection Authority (EPA) has weak institutional capacity and has been without a Director General for the past two years. Air pollution from the oil/petroleum sector and crude-oil power generation is a serious environmental and health concern. The EPA requested USG assistance with developing an emissions monitoring program. ROPME, the regional seas organization based in Kuwait, also signaled a desire for increased re-engagement with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). End Summary.

THE SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY LANDSCAPE
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13. (U) Kuwait's science and technology (S&T) establishment is dominated by the GOK's Kuwait Institute for Scientific Research (KISR) and the non-governmental Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Science (KFAS). KISR focuses on applied research in petroleum, environment and urban development, food resources, water resources and economics. Under the next national strategic plan, KISR hopes that S&T funding will increase to 1% of total GDP and provide a boost to let KISR focus on strategic projects in renewable energy, water resources and the petroleum industry.

KISR plans to monetize its R&D in water, tissue culture in food production, and petroleum services by creating three private sector entities to commercialize the research. In meetings with Amman ESTH Hub Officer and Econoffs, KISR requested U.S. assistance related to environmental health epidemiology, emerging pollutants, developing environmental indicators, and improved air pollution indexes. KISR was also keen to benefit from USG experiences in the renewable energy field. (Note: given the weakening economic situation in Kuwait and given ongoing tense relations between the Government and Parliament, Post is doubtful that KISR will enjoy significantly increased funding in the next one to two years. Similarly, Post is dubious that KISR will manage to establish private sector entities to monetize its R&D accomplishments. End Note).

14. (U) The 32 year-old KFAS currently has \$1.5 billion in endowments funded over the years by 1% of the profits of Kuwaiti public companies. Director General Ali Al-Shamlan informed Amman ESTH Hub Officer and Econoffs that KFAS provided KD 15 million (approximately USD 55 million) in grants in 2007 and is able to fund any project proposal approved by its international referees. A scientific center established by KFAS attracts more than 500,000 visits annually including thousands of school children to its aquarium and science discovery center. KFAS academic collaborations include Harvard' Kennedy School of Government to support professorships, collaborative research and tailor made workshops for Kuwaiti participants as well as the MIT-Kuwait Center for Natural Resources and Environment. Al-Shamlan noted his desire to follow up on the January 2007 Women in Science Conference in Kuwait (partnership between KFAS, KISR, the Department of State and the American Association for the

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Advancement of Science) with another conference in late 2009.

15. (SBU) Private sector interlocutors such as Fawzi Al Sultan from F&N Consultancy painted a critical picture regarding S&T propagation in Kuwait and why it might lose out to its neighbors. Al Sultan noted that government controls and runs most services -- oftentimes inefficiently -- and lacks a clear strategy to deal with private sector. Since 93% of Kuwaitis work in government jobs, there is a reluctance to allow the private sector to flourish. He noted despondently, "To get into the race, first you have to get to the starting line" of minimum international practices. Microsoft's country manager also highlighted that technology transfer in Kuwait was difficult given IPR violations (estimated at 62% in the software industry) and government inability to give licenses for new technologies. A Microsoft Innovation Center located at KISR also appears to be under-utilized.

AIR AND GROUND POLLUTION =====

16. (SBU) Since the 1991 Kuwaiti oil-fires from the Gulf War, environmental issues appear to have been getting short shrift. The GOK receives large payments from the United Nations Compensation Committee (established by UNSCR 692 in 1991) for the environmental degradation caused during the Iraqi occupation in 1990-91. However, 17 years after the oil-fires, there continue to be large "oil lakes" in Kuwait with resultant groundwater pollution and oil absorption in nearby plant and animal life. Media reports indicate that a bidding process is ongoing for companies to assist with environmental remediation programs funded by the UNCC.

17. (SBU) The Environmental Protection Authority (EPA) -- which falls under the purview of the Ministry of Defense -- is the 300-person GOK entity responsible for environmental management. The Director-General position has been vacant for the last 2 years. The National Assembly recently decided to establish an environmental committee despite the lack of Government support. However, Post's interlocutors at the Kuwait Environment Protection Society (KEPS) and other NGOs state that MPs rarely attend the meetings.

¶18. (SBU) Key environmental issues in Kuwait include:
-- Air pollution from the oil/petrochemicals industry, refineries, and power generation from crude oil with high sulphur content. Many of these plants are located adjacent to housing areas, and several interlocutors told the ESTH Hub officer of possible linkages to increased cancer incidence;
-- Oil-lake remediation: many of the lakes have now dried, but often result in toxic particles in the air during dust-storms;
-- Weak coastal zone management: cases of untreated sewage spilling into sea often result in dead fish washing onto the shores;
-- Waste management: Kuwait is generating two kilos waste/per person on a daily basis with landfills reaching capacity. Some of the older landfills do not have lining resulting in groundwater pollution.
-- Uncontrolled use of limited groundwater resources with no licensing or regulations.
(Note: An oil spill arising from a leak at a power station affected seven kilometers of coastline just west of Kuwait City in mid-January; reftel B. End Note.)

¶19. (U) KISR measures ambient air quality on behalf of the government. While the law requires that any industry with more than 100 staff measure its emissions, there is no industrial emissions monitoring program. There are currently only seven EPA emissions inspectors and while there is

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sufficient equipment such as stack analyzers, EPA lacks the technical and management skills to deploy an emissions monitoring program.

SOLE ENVIRONMENTAL NGO PUSHES AHEAD =====

¶10. (U) Founded in 1973, the Kuwait Environment Protection Society (KEPS) claims to be among the oldest environmental NGOs in the Arab world. Through a MEPI grant it has established environmental clubs at two Kuwaiti universities: 70 students are elected through a democratic process to lead the clubs in environmental outreach, environmental seminars, SMS campaigns and publishing newsletters. The clubs are planning to engage with parliamentarians to lobby for strengthened environmental legislation. (There is no current legislation for air quality, water quality, or waste management). Trainers from Portland State University have provided training in the formation of the clubs.

¶11. (SBU) KEPS was critical of the EPA, noting that "governmental entities are the main pollutants -- how can one government entity control and regulate another government entity?" According to KEPS, the Higher Council of EPA has not met for two years while the Director General position has been vacant. While the EPA published air quality guidelines in 2001, they have yet to be implemented. KEPS also noted that the five air monitoring stations used to report the ambient air quality on the internet, however, the data was removed after emissions started to exceed standards by 70%.

REGIONAL SEAS ORGANIZATION =====

¶12. (U) ROPME, the regional seas organization for the seven states bordering the Gulf (Kuwait, Bahrain, Iran, Qatar, UAE, Oman, and Saudi Arabia) gave an upbeat assessment on the state of marine life in the Gulf and believes that chronic pollution is not rising significantly. Contrary to the views of some environmental NGOs, ROPME's scientists noted that Gulf waters are "refreshed" every five to seven years, oil residues are not rising, the biological diversity is still strong, fisheries productivity has not dropped, the coral reefs do not show any significant degradation, and indicator species such as the Dugong 'sea-cow' have not declined dramatically. (Note: anecdotal information from Post sources indicates that the

quality and quantity of fisheries stocks have suffered in recent years, ROPME's assertions notwithstanding. End Note).

¶13. (U) ROPME is planning a State of Marine Life conference in 2009 to present its recent data and release its formal report. The ROPME sea-area has, however, been designated a special area as of August 2008 under the Marpol Annex 1 provision due to the lack of reception facilities at ports for ships to discharge their ballast water and oil. Noting that NOAA and ROPME partnered in their initial research cruise in 1991, ROPME welcomed potential NOAA participation in the next ROPME oceanography cruise to support increased coverage of the Global Oceans Observation System (GOOS). (Note: The inner-ROPME sea-area is currently not covered by GOOS. End Note).

COMMENT
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¶14. (SBU) Comment: Despite KISR's and KFAS's ascendant role in the S&T landscape, there is no unified science policy in the country. The cognizance of R&D's and S&T's relevance to economic development is often lacking in the Government's planning processes, not to mention implementation. Another

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challenge is attracting Kuwaiti students to scientific fields in higher education -- the easier humanities studies result in a government salary equal to that of a science graduate.

¶15. (SBU) Despite the bleak environmental landscape, there may be signs of progress. KISR currently undertakes many environmental impact assessments (EIAs) for new projects and has noted improvements: previously, EIA recommendations were rarely heeded by the GOK, whereas now, in 60% of cases, EIA recommendations are reviewed and implemented, according to Post's KISR interlocutors.

ACTION REQUEST
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¶16. (SBU) ACTION REQUEST: The GOK's EPA requested U.S. assistance to help it develop capacity for monitoring industrial emissions. EPA also requested U.S. assistance with developing a chemicals management plan. Post requests that OES liaise with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency about a programming partnership with the Kuwaiti EPA to enhance the GOK's capacity to monitor industrial emissions and develop a chemicals management plan. End Action Request.

JONES